

Potter (G. F.)

Letter to Prof. R. S. Mussey.



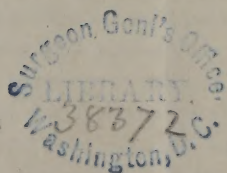
LETTER

TO

PROF. R. D. MUSSEY:

BY

J. F. POTTER, M. D.



CINCINNATI:

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LETTER
TO
PROF. R. D. MUSSEY.

CINCINNATI, May 2, 1850.

PROF. R. D. MUSSEY:

SIR: Agreeably to the notification given you in my note of the 2d inst., I thus address you. Inasmuch as the note referred to contains my reasons for so doing, I will here insert it.

CINCINNATI, May 2, 1850.

SIR: I beg leave to inform you that I purpose sending to the press a copy of the charges you preferred against me in the Medico-Chirurgical Society—my answers to those charges—together with whatever additional evidence I now possess—adding such remarks as may seem necessary for a proper understanding of the subject.

Ever since those charges were made, I have confidently expected that a sense of justice would prompt you to make reparation for the professional injury you have done me, and of which you must be fully sensible. But I have waited in vain. Instead of reparation being made, you have been ready at all times to heap injury upon injury, thus illustrating the maxim, *odisse quem læseris*. I am, therefore, compelled, in justice to myself, to place those charges upon record.

The present time I have deemed a proper one, as the National Medical Convention is soon to assemble here, where I expect to see several of my professional friends, who will be desirous of knowing the nature of your charges, and by what testimony they are sustained. There is yet another reason. I am unwilling that any respectable members of the Convention, or of the profession, strangers to me, should have their minds so abused as to suppose me capable of doing or saying what would tend to the discredit of that profession of which I am proud to be a member.

I applied to the Medico-Chirurgical Society for a copy of all the proceedings in the case, with a view of printing them entire, of which fact you must have been informed. My request was not granted.

I am, therefore, necessitated to confine myself to your charges, as furnished me by the Committee, a copy of which I fortunately preserved.

Yours, respectfully,

J. F. POTTER.

PROF. R. D. MUSSEY.

In the preliminary observations accompanying my answers to your charges, I remarked that, "In order to arrive at just conclusions respecting the difficulties existing between Dr. Mussey and myself, it will be necessary to understand what terms of professional intimacy existed at the time the events referred to in the charges occurred.

It was with much pleasure that I learned of the arrival of Dr. M. in Paris, in the spring of 1846. Dr. M. had been one of my medical teachers, and for him I cherished a sincere respect. I did all in my power to render his visit both agreeable, and profitable. During our friendly intercourse there, Dr. M. took occasion to speak favorably of Cincinnati as a location for me.

Soon after my return home, I received a letter from Dr. M., dated Nov. 18, 1846, in which he said: "I still believe, as

I did when in Paris, that a young man, well educated, industrious and upright, might ultimately locate himself firmly in this city."

I came here toward the close of Dec., 1846. I met with a kind reception from Dr. M. and his former partner, Dr. Worcester, and through the persuasion of the latter, I was induced to locate here.

Dr. M. and myself remained on the most friendly terms, up to the period of Dr. W.'s death. Soon after this event, several of Dr. W.'s families employed me as their physician. Some of these had been families of Drs. M. & W., when in partnership. I had occasion to meet Dr. M. frequently, and he appeared friendly as usual. I visited several of his patients with and for him, and always called him when I needed counsel.

In the early part of January last, a report reached me that Dr. M. had made an unkind remark concerning me, but inasmuch as he had made no complaint to myself, I supposed he had no unkind feelings toward me. I called Dr. M. in consultation on the 16th or 17th of February—he attended with me for five or six days—appeared friendly as usual—made no complaints, nor asked for a single explanation. Not long after this period, I was informed from a reliable source that Dr. M. made complaints against me. Soon after hearing of those remarks, I called upon him for an explanation. He said he did feel hard toward me. I stated to him at this interview, that I felt conscious I had neither, by word or deed, intentionally wronged him, and if he could show me that I had, I would make him the most humble and public acknowledgment. I requested him to give me specific charges, but he declined, and said he would see me again on the subject. This he failed to do, and redoubled his complaints, both in and out of the profession. Finding myself unable to obtain a reconciliation by personal efforts, I asked for, and obtained, this committee. I would here state that up to the present time, I have never made an unkind remark concerning Dr. M.; on the contrary, I respect him as my teacher and former

friend, and regret that in defending myself I shall be compelled to cast some reflections upon his course toward me.

CHARGE I.

“Dr. Potter insinuated that the treatment of Dr. Worcester by Drs. Mussey & Wright was not quite what it *ought* to be. The person to whom this insinuation was made, remarked to Dr. Potter—if you know of anything that will save our friend, why not have it done? or words to that effect. Dr. P. replied that he was a young man, and there were two professors of the Medical College of Ohio in attendance, and they *ought* to know.”

Answer. To this charge I can conscientiously say, that I have no recollection of insinuating that the treatment of Profs. Mussey & Wright “was not quite what it ought to be.”

Respecting the second remark, or that I was a young man, &c., I have no recollection, but if such remark was made, it was made in sincerity and honesty, believing those gentlemen *ought* to know, and did know, better than myself. I have no idea who the person is to whom the above remarks were said to have been made, but with due deference to him, I must say this charge contains an impression never intended to have been given.

NOTE. The only evidence you presented to support this charge, was a letter from your son, Dr. B. F. Mussey, of Portsmouth. I am at a loss to know when he discovered that I had treated you with disrespect. After his marriage, and before leaving the city, he remarked to a gentleman who still resides here, that he supposed I would like to become your partner in business, and that such an arrangement might possibly be made.

Since writing my answer to the above charge, I have a recollection of standing upon the steps of the office of Drs. M. & W., in company with Dr. B. F. M., when a friend of Dr. W. called to ascertain his condition. Dr. B. F. M. referred him to me, remarking that I had watched with him the night before. My answer was,

he is no better. The gentleman then demanded, can nothing be done to save our friend? I have continued my acquaintance with that gentleman since the death of Dr. W., and he authorizes me to state that his feelings of respect for Dr. M. and his anxiety for Dr. W. were such, that if an answer had been given such as the above charge contains, it would have made an impression upon his mind that he could not have failed to remember. He authorizes me, moreover, to state, that he has not the slightest recollection of any such language, or of any language for manner, on my part, inconsistent with the utmost delicacy and respect toward Profs. Mussey & Wright. The gentleman referred to above adds the following:

“The above, so far as it refers to me, is correct.”

CHARGE II.

“Paying his consulting visits in anticipation of the consulting hour.”

Answer. This, I suppose, has reference to our attendance upon the children of Mr. P. in June, '47. Dr. M. was in attendance, but having occasion to go into the country, requested Mrs. P., if the children required attention during his absence, to send for his son William—to which Mrs. P. replied, “I wish to send for Dr. Potter.” I was sent for and attended during his absence. When he returned, I called with him at Mr. P's for the purpose of giving an account of my treatment. The following night the state of the patients was such that a physician was needed, and Dr. Mussey being at Mount Auburn, I was again called. At that time Mr. P. requested that I should take charge of the patients. I declined, and for no other reason than my respect for the feelings of Dr. M. Mr. P. then proposed that I should attend with Dr. M. To this I consented. I made seven visits in connection with him, and Mrs. P. thinks that during that time I arrived once or twice before him, but refused to examine the patients or give an opinion.

The charge that I arrived before the consulting hour, I believe to be incorrect.

The following note is from Mr. P.

"I have read the foregoing statement, and declare it substantially correct."

CHARGE III.

"Paying a visit to a patient to whom he had been called in consultation, after the joint treatment had been suspended."

Answer. This refers to Mr. S., who died on Locke St. in July, 1847. The following account is a condensed statement of a paper by Mr. A. S., brother of the deceased. Mr. A. S. came to my office and requested me to visit his brother, stating at the same time, that Dr. M. was in attendance. Mr. S. said if I would visit his brother, and thought I could be of service to him, he should become my patient. I refused to visit him except in company with Dr. M. Dr. M. and myself made a joint visit the same day (Friday), and a second visit on the Sunday morning following. This was Dr. M's. last visit to Mr. S. On Tuesday morning following, two days after our last joint visit, I was passing the residence of Mr. S. on my way to meet Dr. M. in consultation. Mr. S. called me, said his brother was in a state of stupor, and wished me to see him. He informed me that Dr. M. had not been there since our last visit on Sunday. I saw the patient, but did not make a prescription. When I met Dr. M., I told him Mr. S. was still alive, and of my call. Mr. A. S. and sister assure me that neither of them have seen Dr. M. since our last joint visit on Sunday morning.

How then could he have known, when he wrote this charge, that the joint treatment had been suspended when I called on Tuesday?

[*Note from A. S.*]

"I have read the above, and declare it correct."

CHARGE IV.

“Making a friendly visit in a family during the attendance of another physician.”

Answer. This charge refers to the family of Mr. C. H. Mr. H. and family were among my earliest acquaintances in this city, and from them I had received much kindness. Previous to his leaving for the East, last season, Mr. H. and myself bought an undivided interest of five thousand dollars each, in a piece of property. This circumstance brought us more or less together. He left here with the intention of going to Boston, but before reaching the lake he had the misfortune to fracture his arm, and returned to the city. Five days after his return, I called to see him. I had been in the house but a few minutes, when Dr. M. came in. His visit was short. I left with Dr. M., and rode with him to my office. If Dr. M. considered this a breach of etiquette, he should have told me so at the time, knowing that I consulted him on all professional matters. This is the only instance where I have visited a family during the attendance of another physician, knowing there was sickness in the family; and should not have done so in this instance, except for the friendly professional intercourse that existed between Dr. M. and myself. Mr. C. H. adds the following note:

“I have perused the foregoing statement, and so far as it relates to me, it is substantially correct.”

CHARGE V.

“Taking advantage of professional confidence by tampering with a patient left in his charge during my visit to Columbus in May, 1847.”

Answer. This case occurred in the family of Mr. D. W. My recollection of it being indistinct, I took occasion to call upon the family, accompanied by a medical friend. We saw Mrs. W. in company with her husband, and were informed

that Dr. M., with another physician, had waited upon them about three weeks before. Mr. W. stated that he knew nothing personally, but requested his wife to state exactly what she had previously stated to Dr. M. Her statement was to this effect: that I had spent the entire night in attendance upon her, and when I was about leaving in the morning, she asked if there could be nothing given to relieve her. My answer was, that I would talk with Dr. M., and see what could be done. We met there, and a medicine was given which afforded relief. After she was better, she asked why that medicine was not given before. My answer was, I should have given it had she been my patient, she understanding that I did not wish to take the responsibility of giving it to his patient in his absence. On being asked if I referred to any particular medicine to which Dr. M. had an aversion, she replied that no such reference was made, and that she did not know what the medicine was. On being asked if she received any impression that I was unfriendly to Dr. M., or that I was acting against his interest, she replied that neither herself or friends received any such impression; on the contrary, she believed I was very friendly to Dr. M. She further stated that she voluntarily remarked to Dr. M., that she was sure what I had said was not intended to injure him; to which he replied, "that is not your business, I want his words." On being questioned if she had mentioned my remarks to any one, she readily answered that she had not spoken of it, or even thought of it, until told recently by her mother that Dr. M. would wait on her in reference to it. It may not be out of place to remark here, that notwithstanding Mr. W. said he knew nothing of the affair personally, he stated that the conversation was not made known to Dr. M. by Mrs. W., but had its origin, as he understood, in a recent conversation between his mother-in-law and Dr. M., when the latter complained of ill treatment received from Dr. Potter.

[*Note from Dr. S.*]

"Being the medical friend referred to in the above state-

ment, I hereby declare that it is substantially correct, and I am willing to give my affidavit to that effect."

I now add the following note from Messrs. P. & L.:

"We, the undersigned, called upon Mr. W., and read the above statement to him, which he said was true and correct."

CHARGE VI.

"Uncalled-for insinuations respecting an unfortunate case of apoplexy—giving currency to improper gossip about said case."

Answer. This refers to what passed between Mr. D. and myself on the 21st or 22d of February last. I have had more or less intercourse with Mr. D., and have known for some time of his friendly feelings toward Dr. M. Mr. D. called me to his family, and while there various matters were passed in review—letheon, chloroform, &c. When speaking of those agents having produced death, I spoke of the report then in circulation, that Dr. M. had given too much morphia. I did not suppose I was giving currency to a gossip, but speaking to one who had an interest in Dr. M.'s welfare. I stated at the time that I had no belief in the report, and intended telling Dr. M. of what I had heard, that he might take such steps as he deemed necessary with a view of having it contradicted. Mr. D. expressly states that he related the conversation to Dr. M. from the same consideration that had actuated me, thinking that I might forget to do it. He also stated to me that he was surprised Dr. M. should notice the circumstance as he did. I met Dr. M. the morning following my visit to Mr. D.'s, and related to him what I had heard. On the 16th of February, five days previous to the occurrence upon which this charge is founded, Dr. M. was called, by my own request, to attend a patient with me, and we were still in attendance upon the case when this offence is said to have been committed. I will also state, that during our attendance upon this

case Dr. M. treated me with kindness and respect, no circumstance having occurred that should change my feelings toward him. In conclusion, I appeal to the good sense of the committee and of the Society, and respectfully ask if those remarks, made under the circumstances, could have been prompted by ill feelings and a desire to injure?

The following was added by Mr. D.:

"I have read the above, and so far as it refers to me, believe it correct."

CHARGE VII.

"Conveying an unfounded impression that the views of his consulting physicians in the case of Mr. E. were not sustained by *post-mortem* appearances, and that he, and not they, were correct."

Answer. It will be necessary to state the important points in this case. I was called to Mr. E. on the 20th of July, '47. He was then suffering from what I called intermittent. He had slight cough. On examination of the chest, I found respiration feeble over one lung. On the 24th, by the request of Mr. E., I called Dr. M. in consultation. After prescribing, he said to the patient, "You have a remittent, but I think you will recover." On a subsequent visit, we were detained a short time by a shower of rain. During our detention, Dr. M. and Mrs. E. were in consultation in an adjoining parlour. I was in attendance upon Mr. E. until the 4th of August. I then informed him that, inasmuch as he had had no chill for several days, he did not require my daily visits, but he could let me know if the chills should return. Several days after my last visit, not having heard from him, I called at his house. I found him in bed, and was informed that Dr. M. was in attendance. I saw nothing of the case afterward, until called to attend the *post-mortem* examination.

During my attendance upon Mr. E. he desired a more active mercurial treatment. I declined, and gave as a reason

that I believed his lungs were his weak point, and he should avoid mercurials as much as possible.

After the death of Mr. E it was stated to his friends that he died of disease of the heart. Of this I complained, and stated to a friend of Mr. E. that, inasmuch as the lungs were diseased as well as the heart, it should be so reported.

I never have said that "the views of my consulting physicians were incorrect." I had but one consulting physician—Dr. M. I have never known what his views of the case were after I left.

During our joint attendance, our attention was not directed to the heart, there being no symptoms to lead us to suppose that organ diseased. Whether the patient subsequently presented symptoms of diseased heart, so as to draw the attention of his physicians to that organ, I have never been informed.

NOTE.—The only evidence you was able to obtain to support this charge was, a letter from a young gentleman who stated that he heard a conversation between Mrs. B., Mr. V., and myself, at the house of Mr. B.

The following notes are from the persons with whom I was speaking:

[*Note from Mr. B.*]

"DEAR SIR,—Mrs. B. authorizes me to say that she has no recollection of having heard you speak disrespectfully of Dr. Mussey, or of his mode of practice, either in the case of Mr. E., or of any other, and she is confident, from her relations with the family of Mr. E., during his last illness, that she could not have forgotten it had such remarks been made in her presence.

"Yours, respectfully."

[*Note from Mr. V.*]

"DR. POTTER:

"*Dear Sir,*—In answer to your inquiries in relation to a conversation between yourself and Mrs. B., in my presence, I can only say that I do not now recollect the particulars. I do remember that you spoke of Mr. E's disease as found upon *post-mortem*

examination. I do not recollect of your saying anything derogatory to the character of Dr. Mussey as a physician. Had you done so, I think it would have made an impression upon my mind that I should not have forgotten, as I have always had the highest esteem for the character of Dr. M., and have the utmost confidence in his skill as a physician.

“Respectfully yours.”

I have deemed it proper to withhold the names of the persons referred to in the charges and the answers, although I have them in full in manuscript. As you are well acquainted with all of them, you will readily know to whom I refer. They are all of the highest respectability, and I am under many obligations to them for the prompt and honorable manner in which they have answered my inquiries.

The above are all the charges you preferred against me. I now submit both charges and answers to the decision of the profession.

I am, Sir,

Yours respectfully,

J. F. POTTER.

